

**M**y parents' politics were inseparable from their psyches." In *Party Animals*, Hampstead resident David Aaronovitch lambasts the lifelong commitment parents Sam and Lavender made against all odds, preferring, in his eyes, the "comfortable certainties of life in the [Communist] Party" to looking revelations of Stalin's crimes straight in the eye, castigating all "who lacked the stamina to stay the course". These include unshaken party historian Eric Hobsbawm who found it impossible to renounce "a commitment forged via a structure of beliefs, guidelines, discipline, aims that have illuminated one's life, given it meaning and for which sacrifices have been made".

Backed up by quotes from Dickens to Brecht, Bernard Kops to Neruda and Pete Seeger, many of his recollections ring true. I was born into a similar family background, albeit Liverpudlian, with the same attitudes imbued by osmosis: *Beano* out, *Chuck and Geck* and "tractors and clinics newspaper *Soviet Weekly*" in, the litany of meetings, marches, demos, pre-

# Aaronovitch's party piece



**Norma Cohen** (pictured) finds *The Times* columnist's account of his tormented north London childhood the most riveting part of his sometimes harrowing memoir

Prague Spring trips to Czechoslovakia, *Daily Worker* bazaars...

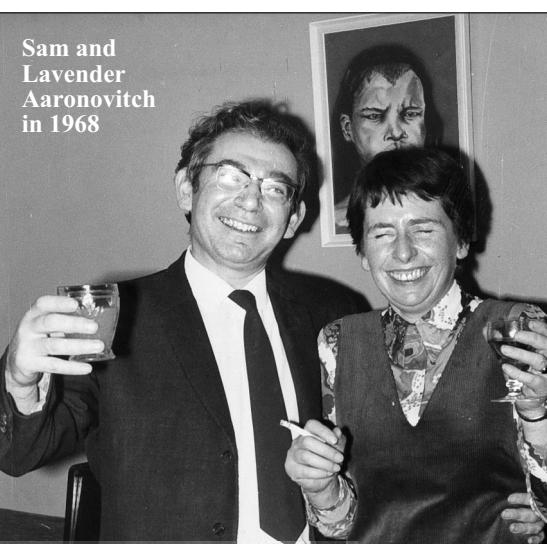
He vividly describes the certainties of that world: "How much more normal could you be?" with its "separate culture and

argot", the contradictions of outlook: "the radical and conservative, bohemian and puritan" or flip Party jargon dismissing Americans as "arrogant gum chewers". Apart from some sharp analogies, I found the style determinedly grim, unleavened by Aaronovitch's industrious research into a brief history of the Communist Party, of "comrades – hardened in adversity" through the downslope of Stalinism via the invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia. He adds to Alison Macleod's *The Death of Uncle Joe* in a gathering of evidential threads into a circular, storybook exposé:



David Aaronovitch

PHOTO: NIGEL BARKLIE



Sam and Lavender Aaronovitch in 1968



Left: David Aaronovitch as part of the Manchester University Challenge team in 1976



Right: David Aaronovitch smiling

buggings and debuggings within MI5/6 surveillance and of blithe party spies whose lives touched those of his family.

Skip the politics, the gripping part of this book is the excoriating last chapter when family dynamics explode in the face of his parents' neglect. He paints a distasteful picture of his ambitious, autodidact father Sam from a bitingly poor East End Jewish family, self-taught at Bernard Kops' University of the Ghetto: the Whitechapel Library. Sam was outwardly a charismatic, leading cadre with a Stakhanovite capacity for "Work, work, work. Rigour, rigour, rigour... learning or marching... no vacuum unfilled". He was, however, capable of physical violence towards his children, carelessly parking his kids to carry out myriad party tasks as smokescreen and parallel activity to a preening philandering at odds with CP notions of decency and family values.

Based on his lengthy involvement with student politics and the

a regime of duty, loyalty and sacrifice, the party replaced the genteel family that had rejected her. Slavishly devoted to her husband, she emanated a seeming dislike and neglect of an obstreperous, "mean and grasping" son who simply wanted, from an early age, to think for himself.

Barred by his parents from going to grammar school (he was at Gospel Oak Primary before going on to Holloway School and then William Ellis) or being told of his promising chances for Westminster, he was unwillingly hauled to long-term family therapy sessions run by esteemed psychotherapist Robin Skynner. Coupled with his perceived outsider status as Commie Jew, all evidence points to a lost childhood, enough to fuel feelings of exploitation and abandonment from parents for the higher good of political ideals.

Aaronovitch is still "furious with that roomful of dead adults". Such intense feelings of hurt, resentment and betrayal by his parents and the politics they embodied may well reverberate long after the sparks thrown up by this memoir have settled.

In the pose reminiscent of David's Marat, it's a poignant part of an exhibition which opened this week and runs until June 12.

When my presentation carriage clock – I didn't want a gold watch – stops chiming, I wind it up. But, as Joan Bakewell, otherwise Labour peer Baroness Bakewell, acclaimed TV presenter, ardent feminist suggests, the moment comes when you can no longer add to your time on earth.

Hence the title of her new book, *Stop The Clocks: Thoughts On What I Leave Behind*, in which, at 82, she confronts what she has described as her gregarious "rather noisy life", though not necessarily all its contradictions.

But, as you might expect from such a formidable intellect, she is refusing to disappear with a whimper, the ebullient Bakewell waving a polite farewell. It's more an explosion of provocative and poignant views from the woman annoyingly crowned "the thinking man's crumpet" by the humorist Frank Muir.

She insists she has left the fray, now spending weeks alone in Church Cottage, tucked in Shakespeare country far away from her £5million home in Primrose Hill, her happy delight now walking by the stream and enjoying the garden.

It was where she contemplated and wrote the book, pointing out: "I think as you get older, nature is suddenly more wonderful. When the

## The art o

Pity poor Hippolyte Bayard, yet another Frenchman to hold a claim to be the father of photography but, alas, never to have gained that recognition.

Nevertheless Tate Modern is showing a facsimile of his 1840 *Self-Portrait as a Drowned Man*, produced to vent his anger at the establishment which he judged had robbed him of the prize.

In the pose reminiscent of David's Marat, it's a poignant part of an exhibition which opened this week and runs until June 12.

*Performing for the Camera\** brings together over 500 images, spanning a century and a half, about the relationship between performance and photography in many and different forms.

Bayard wrote: "The corpse which you see here is that of M. Bayard, inventor of the process that has just been shown to you. As far as I know this indefatigable experimenter has been occupied for about three years with this discovery. The government, which has been only too generous to Monsieur Daguerre, has said it can do nothing for Monsieur Bayard, and the poor wretch has drowned himself."

His image features in a section of self-portraits that includes

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